

WORKPLACE GENDER DYNAMICS: PROBLEMS FACED BY WOMEN IN KARNATAKA

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ABSTRACT

Karnataka, a diverse state with various religions, customs, and cultures, recognizes the significant role of women in its development. For the social, economic, and political progress of any state, the active participation of both men and women is essential. However, it is concerning that women in Karnataka often face barriers to advancing their careers. Family responsibilities often confine women to the role of homemakers, limiting their career opportunities. Despite this, more women in Karnataka are becoming aware of their potential and seeking careers outside the home. Even when qualified women are available, preference is often given to men with the same qualifications. Working women encounter numerous challenges and issues in their workplaces, such as unequal pay for equal work, sexual harassment, inadequate sanitation facilities, unsafe roads and transportation, denial of promotions, and difficulty maintaining a work-life balance.

This study aims to identify the challenges faced by women in various sectors and explore potential solutions to address these issues. By empowering women to recognize their value and skills, the study hopes to equip them to confront these challenges effectively. Traditionally, the public sphere has been perceived as a male domain, with few women daring to navigate the complexities of the workplace. This paper critically examines the various issues faced by women in the workplace, drawing on secondary sources to review existing national legal frameworks that protect working women. It also highlights the efforts of the Karnataka state in enforcing the provisions of the Indian Constitution to create equal and safe workplaces for women. The paper concludes with recommendations that, if implemented, could significantly empower women and boost their confidence to succeed professionally.

KEYWORDS: *Working Women, Discrimination, Challenges, International Law, Indian Constitution, Women Empowerment*

Article History

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INTRODUCTION

Women are the backbone of the society. She plays a vital role in the economic development of the state and her contribution is as equal as their male counterparts. Without active participation of women in various state, social, economic and political activities, the progress of the state will be stagnant. Traditionally, Karnataka women had been home makers but in 21st Century, due to higher education, better awareness and increasing financial demands of family, women also go out and choose careers. Although Karnataka women have started working outside their homes, but still there are several issues and challenges that working women face today. The workplace has never been equal for men and women. In spite of

possessing equal qualifications, women workers in most occupations are paid less than that of men. Sexual harassment of women abounds in every sector of work. In addition to these, women are deprived of their right to maternity leaves and are often shown the door once they conceive. Promotions are often denied to deserving women who have to work doubly hard to prove their mettle. The top positions in most organizations are usually occupied by men despite there being eligible women who are equally qualified and capable of shouldering the responsibilities.

Development report released by world bank in the 2017 report. India had one of the lowest female participation in the workforce, ranking 120th among 131 countries. It is mentioned that data on Employment and Unemployment is collected through Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) conducted by National Statistical Office (NSO), Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MOSPI). As per the latest PLFS report for year 2019-20, the estimated Worker Population Ratio (WPR) on usual status basis for aged 15 years and above for female was 28.7% respectively. Karnataka state female worker population ratio 31.7 Per cent, and worker population wise ranking 12th among 37th states. in the 2019-20 report. It also examines the role the state in making workplaces equal and safe for women by enforcing the various provisions of the Indian Constitution.

There are many acts to uplift the workers such as the unorganized worker's social security act 2008, and the Domestic worker's welfare and social security act- 2010, The Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 now subsumed in the Code on Wages, 2019 provides that there shall be no discrimination in an establishment or any unit thereof among employees on the ground of gender in matters relating to wages by the same employer, in respect of the same work or work of similar nature done by any employee. Further, no employer shall make any discrimination on the ground of sex while recruiting any employee for the same work or work of similar nature in the conditions of employment, except where the employment of women in such work is prohibited or restricted by or under any law for the time being in force but these acts are not valuable as the working women have to always work in miserable conditions.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to evaluate problems and challenges of women in work place of Karnataka. However, specifically, the study tried to attain the following objectives.

- a. To analyze the various problems of women in work place of Karnataka
- b. To examine the challenges facing by women in work place in the study area.
- c. To bring out the role of the Indian state in improving the working conditions of women.
- d. To estimate the recommendations to improve the lives of working women by empowering them and providing equal opportunities in the workplace.

According to the 2011 Census, Karnataka had a total of 27,872,597 individuals engaged in work activities. Of these, 83.9% were involved in main work (employment or earning for more than six months), while 16.1% were engaged in marginal activities, providing livelihood for less than six months. Among these workers, 5,119,921 were employed as agricultural laborers. Recent quarterly Periodic Labour Force Surveys (PLFS) indicate a further decline in participation rates. In the January-March 2018 quarter, states like Himachal Pradesh (29.6%), Andhra Pradesh (23.1%), Karnataka (19.7%), and Jammu & Kashmir (18.7%) were among the top performers. Conversely, Bihar remained the lowest performer with a participation rate of 4.8%, followed by Delhi at 8.8%.

Problems and Challenges Faced by Women in the Workplace in Karnataka

Gender Biases

Gender biases in Karnataka often manifest at an early stage, making it difficult to acknowledge that women are equally capable of working alongside men. Indian society predominantly supports male dominance in significant and challenging tasks, while women are often viewed as capable of handling only lesser responsibilities. The potential and capabilities of Karnataka women are frequently underestimated, particularly concerning recruitment, salary, and promotion. In many cases, even if a woman is employed, her salary is handed over to her husband, father-in-law, or another senior family member, thus limiting her independence.

Balancing Personal and Professional Life

For working women in Karnataka, balancing work and family responsibilities is a significant challenge. Women are expected to meet the demands of their family, especially children, even when pursuing a career. In Karnataka, career aspirations for women are often viewed as secondary. Many families lack the emotional and moral support that working women need. Simultaneously, women are expected to meet professional deadlines, leading to stress from juggling dual roles.

Mental and Physical Harassment

To succeed in the corporate sector, women often feel the need to outperform their male colleagues, resulting in increased pressure and expectations from their superiors. This can lead to significant stress. Insufficient maternity leave further compounds this stress, as women must manage both childcare and work targets. Additionally, workplace safety remains a concern for many women in Karnataka. There have been instances where female employees are asked for sexual favors by male superiors in exchange for promotions or career advancement. In many corporate settings, women are perceived as weak and vulnerable, leading to exploitation by male colleagues and superiors.

Limited Personal Space: Karnataka's working women face the challenge of balancing their professional and personal lives to achieve independence and success. This often leads to increased work pressure, lack of sleep, and feelings of frustration and helplessness due to inadequate support. Emotional and psychological issues, such as insomnia and depression, are common. Many women struggle with a lack of personal space, feeling isolated and unable to share their feelings, knowing they might not be understood. Under such psychological pressure, they may be left with only two choices: to leave their job or accept depression as part of their working life.

Unsafe Roads and Transportation: Women in Karnataka continue to feel unsafe using public transport, a concern that remains prevalent even after high-profile incidents of violence against women in public spaces. Limited safe public transport options after 10 p.m. mean many people rely on private vehicles, auto-rickshaws, or taxi services. As night falls, fewer women are seen on the streets, highlighting a lack of gender diversity in public spaces. Key factors that contribute to women feeling unsafe include poor lighting, inadequate security, and insufficient visibility from street vendors, shops, or street-facing homes.

Inadequate Sanitation Facilities: The absence of adequate sanitation facilities at workplaces negatively impacts women. According to the 2011 Census, women comprise 48% of India's population, with a workforce participation rate of only 29% among women over fifteen years old. This disparity can be partly attributed to the lack of safe and accessible sanitation facilities, which affects women's willingness and ability to work.

Issues

- a. Insufficient maternity leave poses a significant issue for working mothers, impacting their job performance and personal lives.
- b. Lack of adequate family support is another challenge. Household duties are still primarily viewed as a woman's responsibility. Working late hours can be frowned upon, affecting women's job performance and career advancement.
- c. Poor security at the workplace is a significant concern, particularly in corporate sectors and private organizations where women may face various crimes due to inadequate security measures.
- d. Unequal pay remains an issue, with women often receiving lower salaries than their male counterparts despite demonstrating equal or greater efficiency. This disparity can lead to feelings of depression and demotivating.
- e. Balancing dual roles makes it difficult for working women to dedicate time to their children's activities and school functions, resulting in added stress.
- f. Despite their dedication, women's professional priorities are often considered secondary by family and society. There is still an expectation that a woman's primary role is to manage her household and children, hindering career development.
- g. Women often need to seek permission from their husbands and family members for business trips or training programs necessary for career advancement, a requirement not typically imposed on men.

Psychological Aspects of the Problem

Analysis shows that a majority of working women experience stress caused by conflicting roles. They must manage professional responsibilities, family demands, and social obligations simultaneously. Women with rigid work schedules report more difficulties balancing work and family than those with flexible schedules. This can lead to health issues such as headaches, hypertension, and obesity. The stress level tends to increase with age, as older women take on additional responsibilities both at work and home. Working hours also play a role in stress, with demanding jobs causing physical and mental fatigue. Childcare arrangements further contribute to stress, as working mothers must ensure their children's well-being and daily needs are met.

Government's Role in Protecting Women Workers

The Indian Constitution guarantees women equality before the law, and there appears to be substantial institutional support with numerous laws aimed at protecting women's rights in the workplace. However, while these laws are abundant in the organized sector, they are often poorly enforced and are frequently circumvented by employers. Several factors contribute to this issue, such as ambiguities in the legislation, unclear definitions of coverage, and weak enforcement mechanisms. Furthermore, India's labor laws can vary significantly, being region-specific, industry-specific, or centralized, with some centralized laws allowing for state-specific amendments. This results in inconsistent labor regulations. Although progress has been made against gender inequality through the efforts of the Indian feminist movement, understanding the legal framework governing women's participation in the organized sector is crucial for achieving gender equity in Karnataka.

Gender Discrimination

While the Indian Constitution guarantees fundamental rights to women, its jurisdiction predominantly covers state or public institutions and often does not extend to the private sector.

The Indian Constitution

The Constitution enshrines equality as a fundamental right. Key articles include:

Article 15: Contains provisions for women, children, and socially or educationally disadvantaged groups, ensuring these provisions are not considered discriminatory.

Article 16: Ensures equality of opportunity in matters related to public employment.

73rd Amendment Act: Guarantees that one-third of seats in Panchayats are reserved for women.

74th Amendment Act: Guarantees that one-third of seats in Municipalities are reserved for women.

Equal Remuneration Act, 1976

This law is designed to prevent gender discrimination in wages, hiring, promotion, and training. However, employers can sometimes bypass this law by reclassifying jobs into skilled and unskilled categories, often placing women in lower-paid, unskilled roles regardless of the actual nature or skill level of their work. Key provisions include:

Ensuring equal pay for men and women performing the same or similar work.

Prohibiting discrimination in recruitment and service conditions, except where specific restrictions apply to women's employment (such as night shifts or particular industry regulations).

Equal Remuneration (Amendment) Act, 1987

This amendment strengthens the 1976 Act by increasing penalties for violators and establishing jurisdiction for the trial of offenses related to wage discrimination.

National Commission for Women Act, 1990

This Act established the National Commission for Women, tasked with reviewing existing statutory protections for women, preparing periodic reports for the Central Government on women's rights safeguards, investigating complaints about the deprivation of these rights, and providing financial assistance for litigation related to women's issues.

Sexual Harassment at the Workplace

Sexual harassment is a severe violation of women's rights to equality and dignity. Rooted in patriarchal attitudes that perceive men as superior to women, it includes behaviors often trivialized as harmless or natural. However, workplace sexual harassment is a significant manifestation of sex discrimination. Contrary to the misguided belief that such behavior is merely 'harmless flirtation,' it causes substantial harm and undermines women's rights.

Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946

This Act includes provisions designed to protect women from sexual harassment at work, among other employment-related safeguards.

Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act, 2013

This legislative act in India is designed to protect women from sexual harassment at their workplaces, replacing the earlier Vishakha Guidelines established by the Supreme Court of India. The act defines what constitutes sexual harassment and establishes a framework for addressing complaints. It mandates the creation of an 'Internal Complaints Committee' within workplaces and a 'Local Complaints Committee' at the district and block levels to handle grievances. The responsibility of overseeing and ensuring compliance with the Act falls to a District Officer, who is typically the District Collector or Deputy Collector.

Parental Benefits and Policies

Some companies in India are adopting gender-sensitive policies, including flexible work hours and on-site childcare facilities, to support working mothers. However, discrimination and harassment remain prevalent in some workplaces, particularly when women announce pregnancies. Terminating employment due to pregnancy is illegal under the Maternity Benefit Act, yet it remains a common issue, reflecting a broader pattern of discrimination against working mothers in Indian organizations.

Maternity Benefits Act, 1961

Grants women 12 weeks of maternity leave with full pay for childbirth (no provision for adoption leave).

Prohibits employers from dismissing or discharging women employees during or because of maternity leave.

Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Bill, 2016

On March 9, 2017, the Indian Parliament passed an amendment increasing paid maternity leave for women in the organized sector from 12 weeks to 26 weeks, benefiting approximately 1.8 million women. This law applies to all establishments with 10 or more employees and covers the first two children. For the third child, the leave entitlement remains at 12 weeks. With this change, India ranks among the top three countries for paid maternity leave, following Canada (50 weeks) and Norway (44 weeks).

Factories Act, 1948

This Act mandates that employers provide childcare facilities for children under six years of age in workplaces where more than 30 women are employed. However, enforcement is weak, with few inspections to ensure compliance, and employers often evade these requirements by hiring fewer than 30 women or relying on part-time or contract labor.

Plantation Labour Act, 1951

- a) Requires plantations with over 50 women workers to provide childcare facilities, even for those employed by contractors.
- b) Mandates childcare facilities when women workers collectively have more than 20 children.
- c) Entitles women workers to breaks to breastfeed their children.
- d) Employee's State Insurance (General) Regulation, 1950
- e) Maternity benefits are provided from the date a medical certificate is issued for pregnancy-related issues, such as miscarriage, sickness, bed rest, or preterm birth.

Contract Labour (Regulation & Abolition) Act, 1970

Requires daycare facilities in workplaces where 20 or more women are regularly employed under contract.

Beedi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Employment) Act, 1966

This Act aims to safeguard the welfare of workers in beedi and cigar factories by regulating working conditions, including working hours and workplace safety. It also mandates childcare facilities for working mothers and requires the inclusion of women in the Advisory and Central Advisory Committees.

CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed the various problems and challenges faced by working women in the 21st century, particularly those relating to balancing personal and professional lives. Women often endure significant difficulties to maintain this balance and stay healthy. The rising number of reported crimes against women highlights the likelihood of many more unreported cases due to fear and social stigma. Sexual violence is both an expression of power and a manifestation of sexual desire, underscoring the need to respect, protect, and fulfill women's rights—including the right to property, health, education, and a life of dignity. Effective law enforcement is essential to combat these crimes. Ensuring women's safety is crucial for their full participation in public life. The solutions must be grounded in a framework of rights, allowing women to access the full range of rights afforded to them as citizens.

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